

Board's Horse Rules Lassoed

By KEITH L. MARTIN

What was intended as a public hearing for citizen feedback on proposed rules governing the keeping of horses quickly turned confrontational Thursday night, as many who own the animals felt the Board of Health was ruining the rural feel of the town by running horses out of Duxbury.

The Board of Health held Thursday's session to

clarify any confusion with the proposed regulations which are still in draft format after a year of work. At the start of the hearing, Chairman Thomas O'Regan informed those in attendance that it would be the only public forum on the matter, but if citizens wanted to attend future board meetings where it was being discussed, they could do so.

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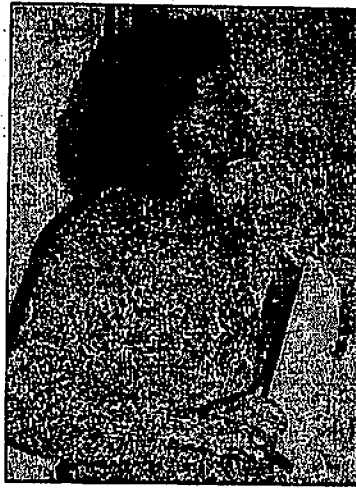
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That would change, however, as horse owner after horse owner in the standing room only Mural Room expressed their disappointment and outrage at what was being presented.

Equestrian journalist and trainer Annie Eldridge of Harrison Street was the first to address the board, questioning the credentials of those they sought to help craft the new rules and asking the board if any of them owned horses. With a reply of no from every board member, Eldridge urged the board to listen carefully to each of the people who addressed them, adding that she had met with the board this summer, but none of her suggestions appeared in the draft regulations.



Horse owners expressed their frustration with proposed rules to keep horses on their property last week.



Harrison Street's Annie Eldridge questioned the experts the Board of Health used in coming up with new horse and stable rules.

O'Regan reminded Eldridge that the board is doing their best to create regulations, as they are just in draft format, and that everyone's input would be listened to and valued.

"When you say to us it's our 'last opportunity to comment,' you put us on the defensive," said Eldridge.

She went on to comment on the separation requirements in the proposed regulations, which call for a 150-foot setback for corral fencing from a dwelling not occupied by the owner or operator or 25 feet to the property line, saying this prevented anyone with a one acre lot from keeping a horse on that property. Eldridge questioned how they could do this as these regulations should be in line with zoning regulations by the town.

She also questioned why the board was specifying the size of a corral or paddock at a minimum of 1,250-square feet, saying that this shouldn't be an issue of size, but of management of the space.

"You really can't dictate to

a horse owner what kind of [loose running in a corral] their horses deserve," she said. "That is as personal a matter as child rearing is to parents."

Merry Avenue's Susan Littlefield said she did not understand the need for rules and regulations after hundreds of years without them, especially in Duxbury, a town that just worked to save the O'Neil farm. She said the new rules would change the rural character of the town and that this is more about owners taking care of their horses, which many in town do.

Debbie Yates, a veterinarian, said that if the regulations were a reaction to a concern for public health, the document "way oversteps its boundaries."

"Horse owners know more about this and make all attempts to be good neighbors in Duxbury," she added, saying it should up to the owner to look at their own property and make the best arrangements for them and abutting neighbors.

She echoed concerns on setbacks and corrected the board's rules on immunization, citing concern regarding equine encephalitis, which she said comes from birds, not horses.

Even non-horse owners, such as Lisa Marnell, spoke out against the proposed rules. She told the board that she is planning to get a pony in the near future for her children, but if these regulations passed as is, that would not be possible.

Lincoln Street's David Cheney took the implementation of the rules one step fur-

ther, saying that if they passed, he might have to "put down" two of his older horses, at which many in the crowd mumbled shock and sadness.

The only person among the 20 or so that addressed the board to speak in favor of the regulations was Bay Road's Judy Tortora, who said that the town has changed over the years and that there are very few who live here who consider it "rural" with the density in population and housing. As an abutter to a horse owner, she supported the setback rule, saying she did not understand why she had to be closer to a pile of manure than the owner of the animal, pointing out that in her own situation, her house has more flies and mice than ever before.

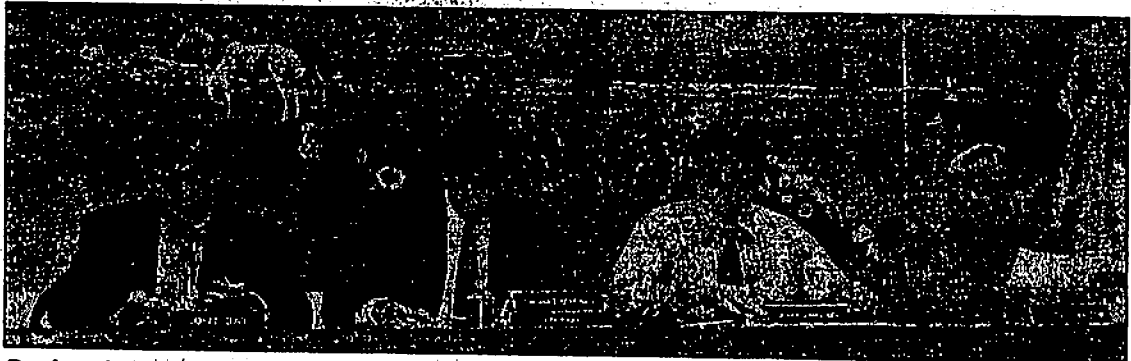
"I think there are those who need to be protected and there are people who are not happy and need help," she said.

Tortora's neighbor, horse owner Susan Roy, said that she felt she was the impetus for the rules, given her interactions with neighbors, which she said has not been done in person, but through complaints and letters to the Clipper. She urged the board to re-examine their regulations and maintain their job of determining issues of health and safety and not zoning through setback regulations "to zone out responsible horse owners."

With so much outcry, Elm Street's Ted Heidenreich suggested that the Board of Health use those in the audience who seemed to know a great deal about horse management, by including them in a subcommittee to help redraft the rules and regulations, a suggestion met with applause by many in the audience.

After the meeting in which board members admitted several times that they needed more work on several issues raised by horse owners, O'Regan asked for volunteers for the committee, a request met by over a dozen horse owners.

"We fully anticipate a follow-up to this hearing and reaching out in a more formal way for community representatives as we digest this input and readdress the document we put out at another public hearing," he said. "Let's get this right the first time."



Duxbury's Board of Health got an earful Thursday night from angry horse owners in town over proposed rules and regulations governing horses and stables.